

# Theatre as a Means of Linguistic and Intercultural Expression in the ELL Classroom

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the use of drama in the classroom for the purpose of creating and increasing linguistic and intercultural skills. Included are three brief case studies of ELL students, which serve as the purpose for the exploration. What follows is a literature review of research spanning nearly seven decades from theatre practitioners, sociologists, and linguists. The research notes the importance of developing intercultural understanding across disciplines and the need to better assist ELLs in language acquisition. Reviewed papers range from case studies of intercultural performance groups to best practices of ELL instructors. The next section of the paper is a proposal for research into developing a series of dramatic activities that can be adapted for multiple classroom instruction to aid ELLs and their peers in language acquisition and intercultural discourse. The paper concludes with desired outcomes for the proposed study.*

## STUDIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

My interest in working with diverse populations has grown since my first major intercultural exchange at a summer camp in Minnesota. Since that time, I have had the opportunity to visit with peoples from around the world in their home countries and the privilege to teach in six classrooms within three different countries. It was in these diverse settings I have learned the power of theatre in the classroom and hope to learn how to provide more comprehensive language and intercultural learning through the art form.

In two countries where I have taught, India and Thailand, traditional rote memorization and workbook progression is the norm. I found that my students had little understanding of the material they were asked to digest, they were unable to apply their knowledge in more than one context, they made very few- if any- cross-curricular

connections, and they had an inability to demonstrate knowledge outside of a testing environment.

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### **CASE #1, India: Matilda and the science test**

Matilda was a third grader when I knew her. She was a hard worker who was popular amongst her peers. Because her English conversational ability was far superior than most students her age, she was often found translating a teacher's directions for other students. However, she performed below the norm in her schoolwork, even though she spent nearly four hours on her homework and studying for exams every night.

I inquired into Matilda's study habits, observing how she worked and what resources she consulted for her work. She lived in a hostel with nine other students from the school, so I was able to observe her daily interactions with these students, one of which (her roommate) was in the same grade. I spent a week formally observing Matilda studying for a science exam on photosynthesis. I found that Matilda was copying down verbatim what her teachers wrote on the board. After a few days of studying, I asked her some questions about the material. First, I asked her to tell me what photosynthesis was. She was unable to tell me, citing that she didn't understand. I looked through her notes and decided to redirect my question. This time, I asked her for the definition of photosynthesis. She proceeded to tell me the following: "Photosynthesis. P-H-O-T-O-S-Y-N-T-H-E-S-I-S line I-S T-H-E P-R-O-C-E-S-S..." I stopped her. I realized that when Matilda studied, she memorized how to *spell* the answers; she did not know what the answers meant nor could she put the information in her own words. Her teacher, she told me, would mark her down if she didn't have the exact answer.

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This story was one of my first major alerts that my students were acquiring very little knowledge but excellent memorization skills. I wondered how much my students could understand outside of the classroom. I began to take my students on walks and ask them questions that would encourage them to use their classroom-based knowledge. When my students were unable to apply simple concepts in responding to questions like, "How does that plant eat?" and "Do you feel like Oliver Twist today?," I set out to find ways to make learning meaningful and applicable.

First, in my English class at the school, I began to place more emphasis on gesture. Gesture allowed for more cross-cultural connections. For example, the sign for "come

here,” sweeping a hand toward one’s body, is virtually universal. I made it a point to use more universal gestures and pay attention to slight differences to capture local flavor. For example, in most Western societies, the sign for “eat” is making a bowl with one hand and mimicking spooning in food with the other. In this country, however, the sign was made by making a plate with one hand and feeding oneself with the pinched fingers of the other. Gesture combined with words in the preferred language (in this case, students were learning English), made the acquisition of new words much more rapid than by learning from a book.

I also found it useful to create sentences out of known words, adding in new vocabulary through pictures and acting. I provided explanations using known words to foster a context in which new immediately useful words would be obtained. For example, “the cat sat on the mat” can easily be gestured. If students know “cat” and “mat,” easily learned, as they are nouns that can be represented pictorially, “sat” can be acted out and will be remembered because it was put in an immediately useful context.

I then spent several weeks with other teachers in the school working on teaching students how to put things in their own words using vocabulary they already understood. I then learned that most of the teachers were unable to do so, as they had been taught in the same way as the students. When I realized I could do little to affect student learning quickly, I slowed down and started doing workshops on building comprehension once a week with teachers.

I then spent the next few years developing dramas with my students, as I found that my ELL students learned quickly and enjoyed taking on roles. In dramas, students display their verbal and nonverbal language skills. Students take on characters to share outside of themselves through themselves. I found that students who are often shy to speak something

other than their native language perform with little embarrassment or shame. They seem to transfer their fear to wanting to do well in front of an audience.

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### **CASE #2: Paolo and dramatic activities**

Paolo was a fourth grader when I knew him. He was considered unruly and unfocused by his teachers. He had no firm grasp of any one language, as he had been moved several times in his life. He spoke a smattering of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and English. He had basic conversational skills in each and could not read or write coherently in any.

I began to work with Paolo as a student teacher in a drama placement. I brought several theatre games and sequences into Paolo's mixed grade (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) classroom. Every time we used theatre as a means of learning, Paolo was alert, attentive, and cooperative. He worked well with his groupmates who typically complained during other assignments that Paolo "didn't do anything" or "he messed it all up." I wanted to understand why Paolo responded so well to dramatic activities and less so when completing other work.

In sitting down with the ELL and classroom teachers, the three of us realized that drama allowed Paolo to display skills nonverbally. When verbal skills were required, students in Paolo's group would step up, helping Paolo fill in his language gaps. This language for Paolo was immediately useful and applicable, so it was quickly absorbed as vocabulary. This setting was very different from other assignments where students had more self-directed learning. For example, students were allowed to choose their own reading books to write about in their journals. Any words the students didn't know or misspelled, they were encouraged to look up on their own or seek help from an adult. Because Paolo's written language skills were so low, he lacked the foundation on which to build his own learning. Several adults stepped in to help get Paolo on track, and one adult in particular introduced Paolo to chess; a game at which he excelled. Chess (and drama games!) was then used as a reward for Paolo focusing on other assignments in the classroom.

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### **CASE #3: Pierre and drama club**

Pierre is currently a senior in an international high school. He is an average student who is closely tied to a group of five friends from his home country. When he chooses to speak, he has great insights and the ability to make cross-cultural connections. Pierre prefers, however, to write out his thoughts in class rather than share them orally, which leads many teachers to give him low marks in participation, thereby lowering his overall grade. That's why I found it interesting that he shines as a vocal member of drama club.

In drama club, Pierre is a strong participant. Like in class, most of the time he is found writing, but he shares out when he believes his thoughts will add to a conversation. Because he is an older member of drama club, he encourages and assists younger members with their verbal skills. This led me to believe that Pierre's home culture training has taught

him to save one's speech for pertinent moments. In class, because he isn't an elder or more experienced than his classmates, he finds little reason to speak up. I have found that when Pierre is given time to think on a question and brainstorm his thoughts on paper and when he is told his ideas have value, he is much more willing to share in class.

The second thing I noticed from Pierre's drama club participation is his connection to a third culture. That is, from his native culture and American culture, Pierre has built a third culture. This is often seen in people whose parents come from two distinct cultures or in those who, as in Pierre's case, have been uprooted from their home country and placed in a new environment and try to make their own sense out of the two worlds. Pierre built a dramatic piece around the U.S. Mother's Day, understanding the U.S. significance of everyone in his friendship group celebrating while his own mother was back in Pierre's home country, waiting for nearly seven years to travel to the U.S. In this drama, Pierre chose to put his character in a subway, representing public transportation that exists in both countries. He then chose to talk about his longing not through the lens of a U.S. holiday, but a holiday that has new meaning for him, which is not tied to U.S. culture or his home country, but was born from circumstances of the new culture he has created. Drama club allows Pierre to express his thoughts through symbols, gesture, and words, helping him to develop and display intercultural and linguistic skills.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Theatre games and techniques have been approved for use in classrooms by practitioners of the art as well as general classroom instructors and supervisors. Theatre games and techniques often serve to display knowledge (i.e. a dramatic performance of a text) or to illustrate concepts (i.e. a process drama built around the idea of immigration). The model of a drama can also be a significant aid in English Language Learner (ELL) classrooms. The main elements of drama- mimicry, rehearsal, interaction, and improvisation readiness- are the same tools used in isolation in ELL classrooms. By combining the singular components through the art form of drama, ELL language acquisition goals can be reached more quickly. Moreover, theatre games and techniques can be especially useful in developing intercultural discourse amongst diverse populations within and outside of the ELL classroom.

Research on the use of drama in the classroom and the idea of intercultural discourse has gone on since the 1940s. However, most of this research has been performed by

specialists in the fields of sociology, drama, and ELL, with little interdepartmental collaboration. The majority of research has been carried out as the result of observing a project outside the focus of improving intercultural discourse or ELL language acquisition. In most cases, classroom and other practical application has been an afterthought, not the impetus of research. As the world becomes more interculturally dependent (and more scientific research terms are developed), however, there will hopefully be a trend in researching the long-term benefits of dramatic arts in the intercultural, multi-lingual classroom.

In the 1940s, two researchers, Hymen Alpern and Marjorie B. Smiley, set out to discuss the importance of building intercultural relations in classrooms. Alpern wrote through the lens of a sociologist, while Smiley wrote through the lens of an English teacher. While both researchers advocated for intercultural education within schools, Alpern's focus was on why and Smiley's was on how. These two papers certainly prove that the idea of fostering intercultural relationships is not a new one, as modern research leads most to believe. Also, both Alpern and Smiley cite dramatic arts as one way to bring diverse populations together for shared, meaningful experience. Alpern even mentions "living newspaper," a technique commonly associated with modern, progressive drama. Smiley, though an English teacher, focuses on English and drama as "a powerful means for deepening and personalizing awareness of others," a more typical sociologist stance to education and community. Alpern's and Smiley's writings, however, harbor several ethnocentric values of the 40s, making the "American" system out to be the ideal and learning about others to gain tolerance, not understanding. Smiley makes frequent use of the word "them," referring to those outside of the American cultural system.

Skipping ahead several years, as research papers on intercultural relations and drama in the classroom seemed to have dried up in the 50s and 60s, the idea of socio-drama began to take hold. Robin C. Scarcella, a TESOL researcher at the University of Southern California, delved into the then-current trend of developing communication skills in schools. She had been using socio-drama for several years in her ESL classroom and found that it helped students “develop vocabulary, grammar, discourse strategies, strategies for social interaction, to promote cultural understanding, and to elicit oral production from all students” (Scarcella 43). These skills are highly relevant in today’s classroom, and are elements of language ELL students and teachers most often struggle with. Scarcella also found that socio-drama incorporates both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors, as “it is relevant to the students’ interests” (Scarcella 45). She mentions the significance of the peer group in language acquisition. This is an important factor to note, because often times ELL students are separated from their peer groups and expected to learn language. While it can be useful to work with ELL students one on one or on a pull-out, group basis, it is equally necessary to provide ELL students with opportunities to work with their peers, even if they operate at a different language level. This interaction improves social skills, becomes less stigmatizing for the ELL students, and forces students to be creative in their communication. Socio-drama, Scarcella notes, is not an end-all, but a “valuable supplementary activity” (Scarcella 46).

The intercultural performance debate began to surface in the 1980s. Critics and interculturalists alike pounded each other with labels. In the mid-80s, Stephen Snow noted that “today people are having the opportunity to learn deeply- by conscious choice- from the traditions of other cultures” (Snow 204). He went on to support his claims through a paper detailing his observations of work by Islene Pinder, a New York City theatre practitioner

who spent much of her life learning Balinese dance and incorporating movements into her productions. The Pinder model allowed people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to collaboratively share art. Dance forms were learned and appreciated on their own and later pulled from adapted to suit the needs of the players. This scenario is very much like that of a classroom with ELLs. Everyone and every language/culture can be appreciated on its own. Through collaboration, a third, new language/culture is born and made to fit the needs of the players.

Snow's paper is fascinating due to its in-depth research of a saturated form. That is, Balinese theatre is not only a comprehensive, thoroughly developed set of art forms, the culture itself had been a long time focus of sociologists such as Margaret Mead and artists such as Julie Taymor. This paper also represents an artist, Stephen Snow, adopting the linguistic labels sociologists and ethnographers set forth, such as "hybridization." This era of research into art forms as grounds for detailed scientific study sets the stage for more collaborative writing and researching efforts. Subsequent papers and research endeavors, however, still lack strong interdisciplinary work.

Within the same decade, Patricia S. Dickson, a French teacher, published an article on using drama to learn a second language. While the paper does not focus on ELLs, it is of significance that drama has been found to be useful in *any* new language acquisition, not just English. Dickson begins by stating the elements of language learning; body and mind. She goes on to emphasize the need to exercise both elements in order to properly learn a language. She believes in using structured activities to build a language base so students can progress toward "free expression" (Dickson 302). This research parallels that of previously mentioned researchers, who stress learning rules before learning how to break them and using well-known tools (and words!) to lay groundwork for more sophisticated learning.

Like Scarcella, who warned against using socio-drama as a primary means of language learning, Dickson “reminds teachers not to spend too much time at once on dramatic activities or they might lose their effectiveness” (Dickson 305). Dickson mentions drama techniques, such as guided fantasy, that have been effective in her classroom. These activities might prove useful in designing a drama program for ELL students. Dickson also emphasizes the need to learn the behaviors of a culture, not just the language, which barely brushes the surface of the idea of intercultural education. This idea is a far cry from 1940s educators who probably expected that by the 1980s, intercultural education would be the norm.

In another instance of performing arts research, Andrée Grau set out to observe the Pan Project, a European-based arts group that explores traditional dance, drama, and music forms from around the world. Grau and his performer-researcher team at the University of Edinburgh wasn’t certain what the outcome of observing Pan Project would be. Researchers wanted to find common threads in art forms, analyze forms, learn to better understand cross-cultural communication, and create a method for better research into expressive arts. This type of research lends itself well to studies on language acquisition, because while you might have incredible outcomes (i.e. someone acquires a large vocabulary in mathematics), but you may not know how that outcome came about (was it direct instruction? Repetition? Book knowledge?). Also, since one of the goals of the project was learn how to research the arts better, there is a guarantee that if a method worked well or completely failed, the goal would be met, setting the stage for better future research. After all, that’s what research is all about: building off and learning from successes and failures of previous research.

After stating the purpose of the project, Grau began by thoroughly defining multiculturalism and interculturalism. He felt that multiculturalism was a dead end in research, as it focuses primarily on a comparison of cultures “without looking at the differences within the same culture and within every self” (Grau 9). This statement fits with the current trend of cultural research; not a simple comparison of what is seen as opposing cultures, but a look at connections and influences of many cultures and third cultures as well as contradictions within a single culture. Interculture is therefore defined by Grau as creating and sharing something new from two or more cultures while recognizing that “cultural purity is a myth” (Grau 11). The Pan Project itself is then outlined and discussed through multicultural and intercultural lenses. In performances and workshops, Grau notices a great debate rising as either a culture clash or connection; is copying or modifying an art form an honor or an outrage? This debate currently plays out on stages and within classrooms, often lending itself to conflict. When it comes to language acquisition and forming intercultural relationships, imitation can be a sensitive subject. This is definitely something a teacher or practitioner needs to be aware of and to question when using drama to promote learning. How will imitating be viewed? Is imitating learning? How can a new idea emerge from “older” ideas and meet everyone’s needs as learners and performers?

Grau ends his paper by noting the significance of intercultural artistic work, pulling terms from linguists and other teaching and learning experts outside of the performing arts. He believes that artists can “only benefit from being confronted with new systems of knowledge and from experiencing...bi-musicality” (Grau 25). Grau believes that the more intercultural productions are mounted, the less marginalized “ethnic minorities” will become. Grau elaborates, stating that bi-musicality happens with language learners all the time; one cannot learn culture or language alone, they work in tandem. If this is to occur, language

learners must *want* to be confronted with new knowledge systems, not just trudge through them out of necessity. In other words, the more language learners thrust themselves into new environments and new experiences with open minds and willpower, the more usable knowledge they will acquire. Also, theatre can be used to normalize cultures and garner appreciation not just for various art forms, but for individuals and groups, fostering harmonious intercultural relationships. These relationships will add to increased dialogue of information and ideas, which benefits society in the way Alpern and Smiley envisioned.

Moving from the stage back into the classroom, Shirley Brice Heath, a predominant TESOL researcher at Stanford University, has found drama a useful resource in the inner city classroom. Like Scarcella, she has noted the importance of creating- in general- through peer language. Heath's research focused on two main learner groups; those in classrooms and those in community programs. Heath noticed that dropouts and underperformers were creating exceptional performance pieces in community settings. She found that classrooms are typically focused on individual learning while community organizations were focused on group learning. Her research put fire behind the movement for group and project-based instruction that was to explode in the 90s and continue catching on in classrooms today. In Heath's study, she brought together a team of ethnographers and sixty community organizations. Her goal was to study language use in various community activities. Heath found that in order for groups to succeed, all the players contributed to a linguistic pool that could be drawn from and added to. Heath focused much of her paper on the success of using dramatic arts in this way.

Heath's paper is of great significance, as it merges the fields of linguistics, ethnography, and drama. Heath mentions the idea of removing the self, which makes drama more effective. When one removes the self, especially in an ELL context, fear and ego are

diminished, so more learning can occur. This idea echoes that of Grau, who noted that intercultural participants, when giving themselves fully to an art form, learned more in a short time than they would have by resisting or telling themselves it couldn't be done. Heath completes her paper by discussing a possible solution for ELLs, a summer drama program. While her idea is fairly flushed out and helpful, it does little to address how an in-school program can meet the same goals. Heath suggests preparing students as docents and guides for out-of-town visitors, but this suggestion still leaves much work to be completed outside the classroom. There must be a better way to achieve linguistic competence using drama and collaborative activities in the classroom.

After Heath's paper, more sources arose merging language learning and intercultural experiences. A book review by Jasone Cenoz on a book by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming emphasizes the need to develop ethnography when designing ELL programs. The review discusses the book as laying framework for discussing drama as a means of creating cultural awareness and intercultural competence. It then mentions several approaches to non-native teaching. This book is useful in that it is focused on language acquisition in general, not just English language learning. It may provide practical advice in developing effective dramatic curriculum to aid ELLs.

A year later, a paper emerges on a study of language play in a fifth grade Spanish immersion classroom. This paper follows the trend of increasing cross-curricular collaboration, bringing together researchers from different linguistic backgrounds and acknowledging the role of popular culture in language acquisition. This paper doesn't focus on "play" in the traditional sense of drama, but is relevant due to the emphasis of English language arts as a whole. The paper discusses language play as fun, and as a rehearsal for "proper" language use in different contexts. The paper notes how one can determine play

from rehearsal, which is useful when working with ELLs. Knowing the difference between the two can help one determine when language is truly being misused (i.e. the student does not understand the meaning or significance of a word or phrase) and when it is being played with (i.e. the student misuses the word in a playful context to elicit laughter; the student understands its meaning so much so that it can be applied in a nonsensical way). This knowledge can also help one determine if language is being used in a malicious way, either to hurt someone who doesn't understand or to hurt someone who does. It is important to understand playful and serious language when creating through drama. The more that is understood about how language is perceived, the better a practitioner can guide the drama on a positive, productive path.

Continuing with pedagogy, Steven G. McCafferty researched the effects of gesture in zones of proximal development. McCafferty's research focuses on second language learning, which again broadens the scope of language acquisition in general, not just English. McCafferty enlisted the Vygotsky idea of ZPD, or a measure of knowledge acquired through instruction by personal, unguided demonstration at a later date. McCafferty wanted to prove that gestures assist both speaker and listener when a concept, idea, or thought is illustrated. This study differs from most of the previous studies because it focuses on individuals' ability to assimilate and present information rather than a group's. In this study, McCafferty's researchers met repeatedly with various language learners and videotaped sessions for evidence of nonverbal learning. It was discovered that gestures not only aid in language acquisition, but the same gesture can change meaning throughout the course of a conversation and still be understood by both speaker and listener. This is a revolutionary breakthrough when trying to mount a drama with ELLs. Whereas one might think the audience or participants may get confused if similar gestures are meant to represent different

things, this research proves that the human mind can shift meaning of a single movement to correctly interpret it. This revelation serves to liberate practitioners and language learners from dedicated sound movements to freer expression of ideas through gesture.

Along with gesture, researchers Savignon and Sysoyev sought to understand multiple aspects of successful communication. Their collaboration was a cross-cultural (Pennsylvania, USA and Russia) experiment. They first set out to define how cultures exist and chose to elaborate on culture existing as “a valuable and equal dialogue,” because, in their opinion, that statement “qualifies as progressive and oriented toward the development of the human civilization” (Savignon and Sysoyev 510). The words of Smiley are certainly echoed throughout the rest of the paper, but in more modern, scientific terms. The researchers go on to discuss how second cultures develop. The rest of the paper focuses on the problem of learning language through texts, as they are often outdated. This sentiment seems to reflect the previously mentioned idea of using peer language to increase usable vocabulary. Like the researchers of the 1940s, Savignon and Sysoyev discuss the importance of teaching for tomorrow, especially intercultural communication or students will be receiving antiquated, useless instruction. The paper ends with a case study of a Russian school where students needed to be fluent in both English and Russian language and culture in order to succeed in their communities and attend university. Students were able to demonstrate their knowledge after receiving both explicit instruction and time to complete group projects using reference tools they accessed on their own. Whereas this article has little to do with direct dramatic activities, it repeats the idea of having a firm foundation (explicit instruction) on which to build more linguistic skills. This paper is also helpful in its explanation of how second cultures develop. This information can be used to gauge and nurture intercultural relationships through drama.

In sifting through the resources various researchers consulted when writing their papers, I am surprised to find so many books written about theatre and language learning. I guess I am surprised because I find few of them being utilized by the ELL instructors I have worked with and encountered. Most ELL classrooms I have been a part of or have visited as a guest have been permeated with linguistic manuals, picture books, and dumbed-down assignments. I would like to see these dramatic activities books on shelves and in the hands of instructors who are willing to put the time and energy into this work. I don't see much research happening detailing the outcome of using these references, and maybe that is the reason they are underutilized. There are also very few seminars, workshops, and professional development roundtables that explain how to use these materials. Maybe educators are aware of the significance of these resources, but they are unaware of how to use them. Thus, the sources go untapped.

The seeds for creating a strong argument for theatre as a means of intercultural discourse have been in place since the 1940s. Little major research has been conducted in the U.S. in this area due to few collaborators and the U.S.-based school model not being conducive to this kind of research. The U.S., and especially NYC T.C. models, often offers a prescribed, inflexible curriculum that isolates subjects and leaves little room for freedom of thought. More and more, schools are teaching the same topics in the same ways, whereas research proves that different people harbor different learning styles that need to be addressed. If certain dramatic techniques can be researched to demystify assumptions about language acquisition, there may be a major breakthrough in ELL and intercultural instruction. Also, practitioners and administrators can't seem to get past the discussion of "why art?" and move toward integrating more arts into schools. Numerous research papers expound on the importance and significance of arts-infused curriculum. Practitioners and

administrators don't sit around asking, "why math?", so where does the stigma come from and how can we move past the question?

The U.S. media, especially that which is pumped into classrooms, is not globally focused. CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera are cut off from American eyes. CNN broadcasts a special international program that cannot be carried by local or satellite stations in the U.S. BBC is specially formatted to be seen as BBC America, not the same BBC that is seen by the rest of the world. Al Jazeera, an Arabic news network, is stigmatized by the U.S. and seen as a voice for terrorists, a view that has been perpetrated by U.S. media. The English version cannot be obtained by any U.S. television subscription. With this fear of the "other" and a shield from true world news, globalization in the U.S. is stymied and little intercultural acceptance occurs. How does the U.S. expect to come out as a leader in globalization when intercultural awareness seems to have taken giant strides backwards since the 1940s?

The U.S. puts little emphasis on second language learning, often putting the school requirement off until high school, when it is much more difficult for students to fluently acquire another language. This lack of value placed on second language learning upholds the ethnocentric idea of only learning English. U.S. education holds ELLs to a higher standard when it comes to *their* second (or third) language acquisition. ELLs are asked to achieve the same standards as their peers in classroom performance and on standardized tests in a more rapid timeframe than their peers were afforded. This leads to the exasperation of teachers, administrators, and students themselves. This is not equitable or progressive education and something needs to be done to remedy the situation.

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Eventually, I would like to develop a flexible series of drama techniques that can be applied across multiple disciplines for the purpose of English language acquisition and intercultural communication. In order to do this, there needs to be effective collaboration between teachers, administrators, community groups, artists, and policy makers. This plan can be developed through a longitudinal study involving ELL students in the following settings:

- Integrated classroom
- ELL classroom
- Immigrant/international school
- After-school program

## ELEMENTS OF THE STUDY

1. This study would need to take place in several schools of similar design. That is, similar demographics, curriculum, student-teacher ratio, etc. Schools must have a 50%+ population of ELL students
2. Students would be subjected to curriculum in the following ways:
  - a. One quarter of the schools would have a drama-infused, year-round curriculum
  - b. One half would have a drama-infused, half-year curriculum (one quarter receiving the curriculum first semester, the other receiving the curriculum second semester)
  - c. One quarter would serve as the control
3. Students selected for the study would be given a preliminary exam (such as a current standardized test used by the district as an assessment tool) in all four components of language- reading, writing, speaking, and listening
4. Students would be administered similar exams at 4, 9, 13, and 18 weeks during which school is in session
5. Oral and written reflections from the participants will be acquired at 9 and 18 weeks, asking what was learned (specific elements of language) and how it was learned. These reflections will include both open-ended questions and rankings (i.e. Circle 1-5, 1 being “least likely” and 5 being “most likely”; Drama games in science class helped me learn about photosynthesis)
6. Teachers, administrators, families, and other collaborators will provide oral and written reflections at 9 and 18 weeks, answering:
  - a. How does this work push forward?
  - b. Label?
  - c. Corrupt?
  - d. Withstand?
  - e. Address?

## **WHAT THE STUDY WILL MEASURE**

This study is designed to measure the effectiveness of various drama techniques in language acquisition and intercultural communication within the integrated (multi and monolingual) classroom. It will help determine how often techniques are necessary to be used for maximum effectiveness. It will demonstrate how much these techniques help narrow the gap between native and non-native speakers of English. The study asks if the effectiveness of drama techniques carries over when there is no direct instruction. It also questions if students are able to “catch up” with their peers/those in an opposite study if they receive a latent introduction to drama. This study may secondarily show how drama techniques can aid native speakers in language acquisition and cultural understanding. Further studies can test the effectiveness of drama techniques on adults and different age groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

ELLs deserve a better, more effective education. Cross-curricular activities, which are becoming more popular within mainstream education, need to happen in the realm of ELL. The more ELLs are exposed to within a new language and culture setting, the better they will be able to function. ELLs deserve learning opportunities that place them more with their peers and less in seclusion. ELLs should be able to pass high-stakes tests, which are often designed to widen the “knowledge gap,” a term coined by the media and the governing right-wing. With all the theoretical knowledge of how dramatic activities can aid in ELL and intercultural learning, this change can only take place through research conducted for the sole purpose of determining the effectiveness of dramatic activities on English language acquisition and intercultural communication. Hopefully this study will

yield positive results that can be expanded upon and introduced into a more effective, progressive mainstream curriculum.

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